

Between One Dream and Another: Expression Between the Categories

CHID 390A

This course will exclusively sample recent forms of representation or documentation that to some lesser or greater degree confound or cross generic categorization. That means we won't be doing the usual scholarly heavy-lifting. We won't, for starters, be unduly concerned with honoring the traditional view that such genre-blurring acts must always be understood as originating in the European modernist art movements of the early twentieth century. Yes, those fine art movements certainly loom large in attempts to situate and make sense of later experimental forms of expression—and at times they are unquestionably helpful—but such a strict sense of cultural and historical determinism too often dead-ends in the modernist/postmodernist cul-de-sac. In this course, I am asking that we attempt to understand more recent instances of experimentation in, and as products of, their unique historical contexts. I am asking that we crisscross worlds of creation and social concern. Recent texts/topics will be widely cast and include, in no particular order: “Bartleby the Scrivener” and the Occupy Movement; Wild Style Graffiti and Street Art; Roland Barthes, early “vernacular” photography and GIF's; the camera phone ‘digital’ difference of the Abu Ghraib images as ‘photo documents’; African American artist's recycling of classical European visual forms; and creative or autobiographical non-fiction as anti-historiography. In addition to discussion, seminar sessions will incorporate student questions (from reading responses) and, at key points, impromptu group/break-out exercises. Formal writing requirements include reading responses (2), a critical journal, and a final longer project that may draw or build on any of the former.

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